

- What are inflectional paradigms?

Summary

In this chapter, I examine the defining characteristics of inflectional paradigms. A central issue in morphological theory is whether inflectional paradigms have theoretical significance. According to paradigm-based theories of inflection (e.g. those of Stump 2001, Blevins 2006, Ackerman, Blevins and Malouf 2009, Brown and Hippisley 2012), the definition of a language's inflectional morphology makes essential reference to the structure of paradigms; but according to morpheme-based theories (e.g. those of Halle and Marantz 1993, Bobaljik 2002, Müller 2002), paradigms are instead merely an epiphenomenal effect of principles of morpheme combination, having no essential role in the definition of a language's inflectional morphology.

What is an inflectional paradigm?

In a language with inflectional morphology, **morphosyntactic properties** are grammatical properties to which the language's syntax and morphology are both sensitive. In French, for example, the gender properties “feminine” and “masculine” and the number properties “singular” and “plural” are morphosyntactic properties. On one hand, syntactic agreement relations are sensitive to contrasts in gender and number; thus, the noun phrase in (1) is grammatical because its constituents agree in gender and number, and the noun phrase in (2) is ungrammatical because its constituents fail to agree in this way. At the same time, rules of inflectional morphology are likewise sensitive to contrasts in gender and number; thus, the French adjective **NATIONAL** has distinct feminine and masculine forms in the plural (feminine plural *nationales* /nasjɔnal/, masculine plural *nationaux* /nasjɔno/), while in the singular, the feminine and masculine forms of **NATIONAL** are distinguished orthographically though not phonologically (feminine singular *nationale*, masculine singular *national*, both /nasjɔnal/).

the.MASC.SG museum.MASC.PL national.FEM.PL

Some morphosyntactic properties have specific semantic correlates; thus, noun phrases with singular reference tend to be headed by nouns in their

singular form. But morphosyntactic properties may also lack any obvious semantic correlate; thus, while noun phrases with female reference may tend to be headed by feminine nouns, some feminine nouns (e.g. *recrue* ‘recruit,’ *sentinelle* ‘sentinel’) ordinarily have male reference and others – in fact, the large majority – fail to refer specifically to either sex (*souris* ‘mouse,’ *table* ‘table,’ *invention* ‘invention,’ and so on).

The Verb Paradigm

Verbs have three, four, or five forms. Those with four forms are the most common. Forms are : Stem , Present Third-Person Singular Present Participle , Past Tense , and Past Participle .

Inflectional suffixes: {-s 3d} {-ING vb} {-D pt} {-D pp} .

Models : (learn learns learning learned learned)

(choose chooses choosing chose chosen) , (set sets setting set set)

Each form has its own uses: 1. The stem It occurs after to, after auxiliaries, and in the present tense, except for the third person singular. to sit, can go, we eat 2. The present third-person singular It is used with the pronouns he, she, it, and with singular words or with groups for which these pronouns will substitute. That freshman cuts his class every Wednesday. He cuts his class every Wednesday Each is expected to do his duty. Somebody has left a note for you. Winning the championship cuts no ice with me. 3. The present participle {-ING vb} form It combines with seven of the eight forms of be—am, is, are, was, were, be, been—to make verb phrases. I am writing a letter. He/ She is writing a letter. They are writing letters. He/ She was writing a letter. They were writing letters. He must be going now. She must have been sleeping. It is also used as a subjectless verbal, that is, when it is not the main verb and does not have a subject. His passion used to be playing golf. However, they are in common use as subjectless verbals, as in Owing a cabin in the north woods, Jack was very popular during the summer vacation period. Not knowing what to say, Marilyn maintained a discreet silence. A few verbs—referring to mental activities—are seldom heard in the {-ING vb} such as own, need, prefer, know, hear, like, remember, and understand.

*Jack is owing a cabin in the north woods. *She was not knowing what to do. The present-participle verbal {-ING vb} morpheme should not be confused with the nominal {-ING nm} morpheme or the adjectival {-ING aj} morpheme.

4. The past Tense {-D pt} The most usual forms of the past tense end in the allomorphs /-t/, /-d/, and /-əd/, as in passed, pleased, and parted. It takes other irregular numerous forms, e.g., shrunk, led, began, rode, found, know, swore, shook.

5. The past participle {-D pp} It has numerous forms. The most frequently occurring end in the same three sounds mentioned in the past tense; /-t/, /-d/, and /-əd/, but here they are allomorphs of {-D pp}. The past participle is used with have, has, had, having to form verbal phrases. She has selected a stunning gown. He had never flown in a helicopter. It is also used with the forms of be to form the passive. The orchestra was selected by the committee. The missing man had been found. The past-participial verbal {-D pp} morpheme should not be confused with the adjectival {-D aj} morpheme.

Suppletion It is a process that has affected some of the forms within the paradigm of particular verbs. Let's look at the five-part verb go. go goes going went gone The form went seems out of place. It out to be *goed, or at least a word that begins with /g/. But the entire stem /go-/ has been replaced by a wholly different stem /went/. The total change within a paradigm is called suppletion, and the new form is a suppletive form. /went/ = /go > wɛn/ + /t/ In English, the verb be has eight paradigmatic forms: be am/is/are being was/were been The stem is be and the forms am, is, are, was, were are suppletive forms. Knowledge of the verb paradigm is helpful in determining whether or not a given word should be classified as a verb. If a word can fit into three or more slots of the paradigm, it is classified as a verb. The word begin fits into all five positions begin begins beginning began begun and therefore is given the classification of verb.

Paradigmatic test The word cut has three of the five possible forms :(cut cuts cutting cut cut) But it also fits partially into the noun paradigm cut (singular) cuts (plural) There are two homophonous cut's, one verb and the other a noun. She is cutting the bread. She cuts the bread. She cut the bread yesterday. He has a cut on his finger. He has several cuts on his finger.